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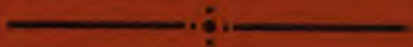
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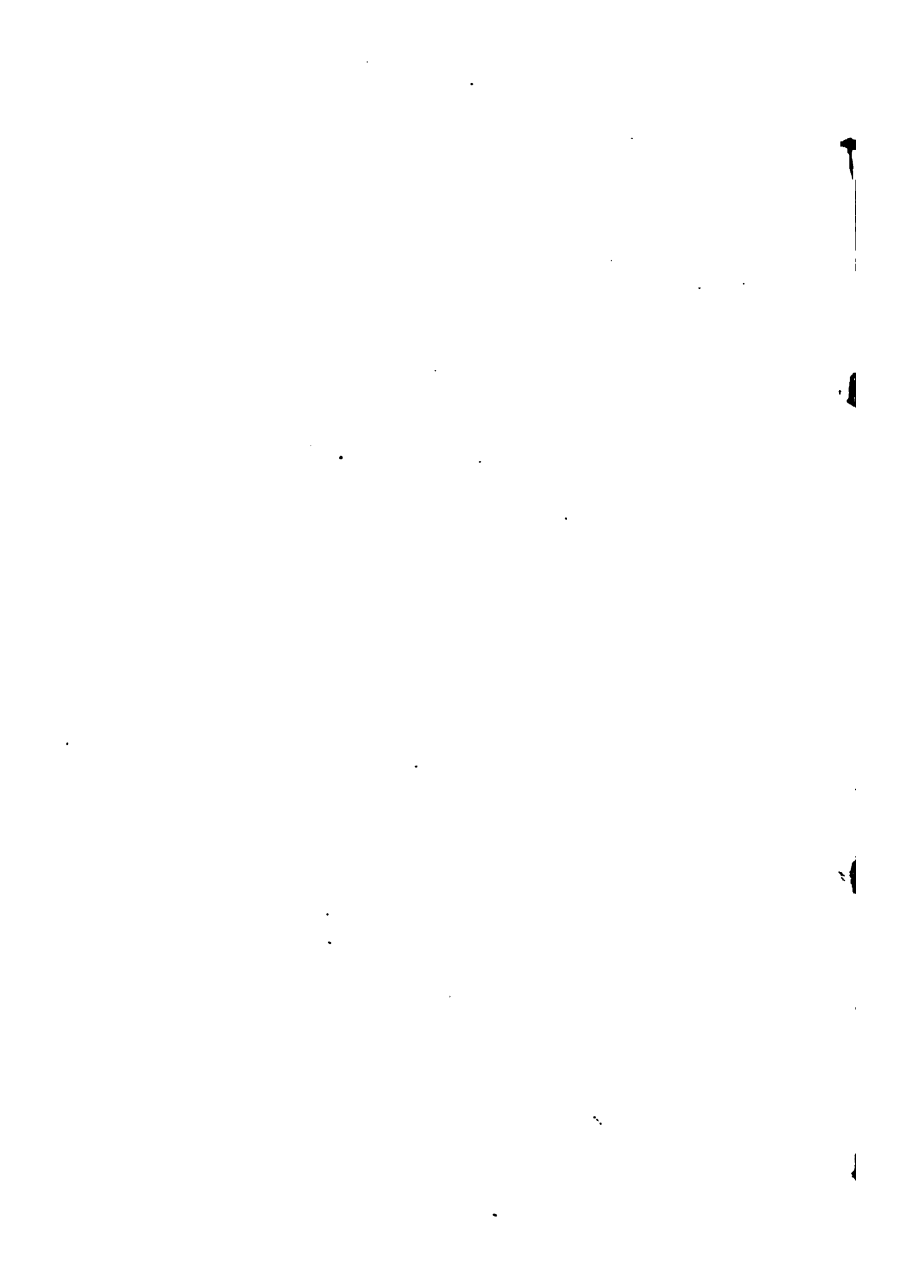




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STORIES FOR OUR VILLAGE.



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By E. M. L.

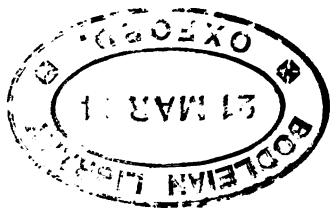
ESTHER TREGARTHEN'S FAITH.

HOW JOHN MERRIVALE CHOSE HIS WIFE.

DAME KREUTCHEN'S GEESF.

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ESTHER TREGARTHEN'S FAITH.

By E. M. L.

CHAPTER I.

'By rains and dews and sunshine fed,
Over the wall the ivy spread,
And in the day-beam waving free,
It grew into a stately tree.'



TO drive a pair of spirited ponies among the beautiful, but precipitous hills of South Herefordshire, requires both nerve and skill. For this reason, Harold Conway paid more attention to Pearl's desire for a loosened rein, and to Presto's too cautious content with the restraint, than to the marvellous variety of the scenery, which unfolded itself anew at each turn of the road, or from each steep ascent which he gained. It was not, indeed, until he had reached the wild upland district of the Llydiatt, where the road becomes comparatively level, that he turned to his companion and said, with a pleasant smile,—

'I thought my wife would enjoy this part of our county. It has always appeared to me unequalled

for beauty ; and owing, I suppose, to the steepness of its roads and the lonely situation of its villages, it is much less known than it deserves to be. The Pengethly hills alone are worth some effort to see, with their pleasing variety of outline.'

'They are, indeed,' replied Ethel. 'Sometimes they appear to touch, and even to overwrap, each other, and presently they open out and reveal a still bluer group beyond. There was one point from which I saw the most wonderful effect of light and shade ; but before I could even ask you to look round, we were plunging down our last hill between those deeply-cut banks. Of course you saw nothing of the ferns, Harold. Oh, such ferns and foxgloves !'

'How so?' asked Harold. 'Do you think I did not see the road, and Presto's efforts to avoid its roughest stones, and the ferns, and all the rich gold-leaf work of autumn, at the same time? I saw it all, Ethel.'

As he spoke, a gorgeous pheasant got up and frightened Pearl, so that talking was out of the question ; and Ethel had to keep as quiet as a mouse, until the runaway had slackened speed ; by that time they were driving through a dark plantation of Scotch fir-trees, and when Ethel looked out for her view it was gone. 'I am so sorry,' she said, regretfully : 'it was the sweetest picture of all !'

It is hidden, I suppose, by that nearer wooded hill to our left.'

'You shall see it again presently,' said Harold : 'but meanwhile, look carefully at that same wooded hill, and try to find Llanarth Church. It is to be seen somewhere, Ethel ; for although you will scarcely believe it, there is a village—rather a large one too—nestling down under the hill. I fancy I can see smoke curling up here and there, but scarcely a roof is visible. Now the church comes to view ; the steeple is a new one, or even that might have kept itself in hiding.'

'What a sly little village, Harold ! I wonder whether that narrow, and particularly muddy road, leads down to it ; we have seen no other.'

'Very likely,' replied Harold. 'I remember my father telling me that the Llanarth roads were indescribably bad, and that in winter the only means of communication between that sequestered village and the outer world, was a kind of "Noah's Ark," calling itself the Llanarth Van. This used to travel once a-week into the neighbouring town, and was as eagerly waited for by the villagers, as the boat that steers towards a shipwrecked crew on a desolate island.'

'At all events,' said Ethel, 'we can certify that Llanarth is most carefully hidden, even in autumn ; but, Harold, you certainly told me the Ilydiatt

Farm was close to Llanarth, and I can see nothing but a low stone cottage here and there in the fields—nothing approaching to a farm-house.'

Harold smiled. 'Don't raise your expectations *too* high. Martin Heath's home is better seen than described. Look, before we turn, at those green swelling hills crowned with larches. What could be more beautiful? And *now*, Ethel, for another view of the Pengethly Hills; I promised you should see them again.'

'Ah, yes; but I cannot even glance at the hills, Harold, lovely as they are at this moment; for there is before us now the most *singular tree* I *ever* beheld!'

'Is it a tree?' inquired Harold.

'Oh, yes, certainly. Look at the branches, and at the curious straight trunk, completely covered with ivy; it is not a pollard oak or an elm.'

'Is it a tree?' again asked Harold. 'The road takes a turn here, so you will see it nearer. Look at your tree, *now*, Ethel.'

'Why, you are driving straight to it! and, oh, Harold, it is joined to that old stone cottage! It is a chimney, and there is smoke curling through the branches! That ivy must have been there for ages!'

Harold laughed.

'You were rather determined to make it into a

tree though, Ethel! And now you shall take a very near view of it, for this is the Llydiatt Farm, and Martin Heath's much-valued home. I expect he would break his heart if we gave him notice to quit, though I suppose he is doing very badly here, from what I am told, and, indeed, from the general appearance of things at the farm. You must talk to him, Ethel; he is a straightforward, kind-hearted fellow, and I only wish he had a good wife, and some home comforts around him.'

'Then he is not married,' said Ethel, rather dolefully. 'I had pictured to myself such a bright fire this cold morning, and such a pleasant Mrs. Heath to boil the kettle and make my tea; and now——'

'Now you find there is no Mrs. Heath, and only a very lonely and rather sad-looking tenant at the Llydiatt! What *shall* I do to make up for the disappointment?'

Ethel smiled.

'There he is, I suppose,' she said, 'standing in the doorway of that dilapidated building. Must I call it a stable?'

'I suppose that Pearl and Presto would have no objection to my giving it that name,' replied Harold, 'especially if we show them some beans and a manger.'

As he spoke, they drove through an open gate-

way into a rough kind of yard before the farm itself—a straight, long building, above the stone roof of which peered the strange, weird-looking chimney.

‘Good morning, Martin,’ said Harold, with the cheerful voice that always won him a smile and a welcome. ‘You did not expect me, I dare say?’

‘No, sir; I should have been gone to the Dyffryn in half-an-hour. Benjamin and Tim were getting the drill out of the barn, and I was putting the seed-wheat ready.’

‘Well, I am come in answer to your letter, and Mrs. Conway will take possession of your house, Martin, if you will allow her, while we look for those pheasants, and talk over the repairs you want done before winter.’

A singular expression—half comical, and more than half doubtful—came over Martin’s face as he replied,—

‘Mrs. Conway is *quite* welcome, sir, if she pleases to make use of it. I will stir up the fire with some fresh wood, and fill up the kettle.’

‘Yes, that I *can* do,’ said Martin to himself, as with a few strong blows he cut up the boughs of an old ash-tree which lay near. ‘That I *can* do; but for the rest, I must leave it, only it is a pity!’

The letter which Harold had received not many

days before, and which had brought him to the Llydiatt Farm, was as follows :

‘DEAR SIR,—I have seen some “phaysons” and “partregs” on your ground by the Dyffryn, and I am afraid if you do not come sune they may get cleared off. Likewise, Mr. Presteign, he wishes to know whether you be willing to mend the fence on the hither side of the wood by Longacre, if he will do his part of same. And there is a crack come since the gale by the west corner of the house, which, if it is not soon repaired, I do think the window will fall in. I have propped it up, and my rent is ready when you come.

‘Yours faithful,

‘MARTIN HEATH.’

Now, Martin,’ said Harold, ‘you must lead the way to these pheasants you promised me. But what about that individual who seems inclined to clear them off? You must look after him a bit. I suppose you have some notion who he is.’

‘Well, I have *that*, sir,’ Martin replied, rather gravely ; ‘but I have only a belief in *my own mind*, so that I should not do right to name no names. However, you may be sure I shall keep a good lookout, both for your sake and his.’

They were passing the open doorway as Martin spoke. Harold stayed to look within.

‘You have a bright fire, I see, Ethel, and a kettle in full song ; so I shall think of you very

soon enjoying your tea, even without a pleasant Mrs. Heath to get it ready for you.'

Ethel's smile, in answer, was a satisfactory one to her husband, who was soon out of sight, followed by 'Sandy' and 'Grouse,' all of them in the best of spirits; but the smile had nothing to do with her surroundings, which at that moment appeared to her to be of the most dismal kind.

The party had disappeared over the hill; she could see them through the wretched little window no longer. Then poor Ethel, looking round her, exclaimed in dismay,—

'Two hours or more, and to wait here! Harold cannot have had an idea of this dreadful room!'

The old clock ticked dismally in the corner, and made an effort to strike eleven.

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'I dare say you would get on a bit faster if you could, just to oblige an unaccustomed guest; but you cannot, my venerable-friend. So take your own time, and I will do my best under the circumstances; only what a miserable home, and how utterly void of comfort Martin Heath must be!'

At this moment the kettle boiled over, and Ethel, with an effort, lifted it off. The result was startling. An unearthly noise, high up in the chimney! a rattle! and then the long line of black links, and the giant hook they bore, swung heavily

back, nor would they by any means be induced to come forward again, or hold the kettle, or do anything useful.

‘I must give it up,’ said Ethel at last, ‘and rekindle my fire, which the water has nearly put out. Well, it shall not put me out; I have plenty of time, and can “watch it,” as Harold says. Meanwhile, if I could find a brush I might sweep a path-way to the arm-chair; and then, if there were but a clean cloth I might cover the table—or, stay!—I must fancy myself a settler in the back-woods, under difficulties, and invent a remedy. In the first place, I can tuck up my dress, and take this wisp of straw—laid ready for fire-lighting, no doubt—and so make my path. That is better: here is clean boiling water; I will wash that basin, and in the clean basin wash a tea-cup, and saucer, and spoon. And now for the tea! Ah, me! it is no use to say I enjoy it, the general blackness around me seems to flavour everything; my tea tastes of wood-smoke, and my bread-and-butter might have been spread with a burnt stick. I will go out and sketch that quaint old chimney—my “tree,” as Harold is sure to call it—unless Martin has an interesting book in the window among that heap. Let me see: *Zadkiel's Almanack*, *Johnson's Dictionary*, *How to Farm with Profit*, bills, advertisements, leather boot-laces, two candle-ends, and a

piece of soap. What a collection ! and thick dust over all !—ah, but not on the Book ! I am glad of that ! Martin's Bible is read, I am sure ; and there is his marker, worked with a dove, and the word "Peace !" Yes, I think there *is* peace in Martin's face. *Peace !*' Ethel repeated the word wonderingly, as she left the house, just pausing to look once again at the general disorder and confusion around her. She carried off one of the chairs into the garden and began her sketch.

It promised well. The picturesque roof and gable, overgrown with grass, and moss, and briar-wood, leant against that tower of strength to the building—the weird-looking chimney ; while far above all, the ivy, in its pride of age and strength, waved its thick and toughened branches, defiant of the smoke, or dust, or gathering blackness, which came from within.

'I believe that the lovely Pengethly hills will come into my picture,' said Ethel to herself, with inward satisfaction, as she made rapid progress with the outline. 'Ah ! my pencil has fallen ! into the long grass, too ! How very provoking ! and I have no other. Alas ! *it is gone !* Now what next can be done by a person of my resources ? There is no shop, of course, but there is a nice-looking farmhouse opposite ; why should I not particularly want some gallinæ—I see they have quite a flock

—and at the same time make my humble request for the loan of a pencil ?’

Ethel crossed the road, and left her footmarks on the whitest of stone pavements which led to the door. It was evident that way to the house was seldom used, or the bright brass knocker on the door itself, for bolt, and bar, and lock had to be turned in answer to her knock. The small hands that had made this mighty effort, and the small voice that replied to her, belonged to Selina Lloyd, who, at the advanced age of thirteen, was installed as general servant of Rye Farm ; and before Ethel could give her message, Lena’s small feet had carried her across a wide kitchen on to the regions beyond, and as quickly brought her back, to say that Mrs. Tregarthen would be there directly.

At this point Selina’s decision of character failed her utterly. Whether to take a lady into a kitchen where there was a fire, or into a parlour where there was none ; or whether it would be better to leave her standing on the doormat, she could not make up her mind : it was, therefore, a great relief when she heard her mistress’s step on the stairs, and knew that the black silk apron was already tied on, and the lace cap, with the blue roses, on its way to meet the pleasant lady she had left waiting so long.

Ethel explained her loss, and asked if Mrs. Tregarthen would kindly supply it.

'Walk into the parlour and take a seat on the sofa, Mrs. Conway,' said the mistress of Rye Farm, in all the importance of her position. 'We have no fire here to-day, though I generally have, to keep my daughter's pianner in tune: a good pianner is worth taking care of, you know, ma'am.'

'It looks in good order,' remarked Ethel.

'And so it ought,' replied Mrs. Tregarthen. '*Five-and-forty* pounds my poor dear husband gave for it; a *large* sum for an instrument, Mrs. Conway! I am afraid you will find it cold—for very cold it is—but I will loose the sun into the room, if you will allow me to pass. I keep the blind down to prevent a glare on the carpet and curtains. I can find you a pencil directly. My daughter Esther learnt drawing at school, and I have a box full of hers somewhere. Ah! they are slate pencils, I see! Lena! Lena! go and see if Master Phil has got a pencil! Quick! My son is always drawing horses and dogs of an evening, and I have no doubt he can supply you. The price of gallinæ, did you ask? Well, they were up in price last Wednesday; but if you will let it bide, I will "leave you know." Very glad to have seen you. Good morning!—Pray do not trouble to return the pencil!'

The longest hour passes at last, and Martin was quietly shutting the gates of the farm behind the carriage, when Ethel called him to her side.

‘I was nearly going away with Mrs. Tregarthen’s pencil : please take it back for me, Martin : and let me leave my best wishes with you, that the next time I come I may find a pleasant Mrs. Heath to make my tea, to say nothing of adding to your own comfort, you know.’

Martin shook his head.

‘How dismal Martin looks !’ said Ethel : ‘and no wonder—for oh, Harold ! you can have no idea what an experience I have had of bush-life in that comfortless home ! My supply of wood failed me, and I had only my penknife to cut bread-and-butter ; and then, in sketching that celebrated chimney—which, by-the-by, will make a splendid subject for a water-colour—I lost my pencil.’

‘Poor Ethel ! what sympathy can I give you, except that it is over now, and that before another summer has passed I hope the Llydiatt Farm will be improved inside and out ; the blackened walls, and——’

‘You will not touch the chimney, though, Harold ! Promise me that—not a stone, not a bough of that grand old ivy ?’

Harold laughed.

‘On that point I am as staunch as my wife. Not a stone, not a bough shall be interfered with.’

‘I am so glad. And oh ! do you know, Harold, the loss of my pencil led to my acquaintance with

the mistress of the Rye Farm. She has an only daughter and a piano, and I think it is a question which has the first place in her affections ; at all events, the daughter has been from home for years, and the piano remains to be the pride of the household.'

'Ah, yes! Ethel, I think I can explain the secret of Esther Tregarthen's banishment from home without much difficulty. Her mother was always bitterly opposed to Martin Heath as a son-in-law : not more so, perhaps, than old Mrs. Heath in her lifetime ; they were certainly agreed upon *that*, if on no other subject. I have pitied Martin ever since I knew him ; his mother ruled, and managed, and worried him, till he seemed to have no will of his own ; and when his father died matters grew worse, for then old Mrs. Heath was haunted by the fear that Martin would marry Esther Tregarthen, in which case she declared he would turn his own mother out of doors, to beg her bread, for that no house in England could or should contain herself and a daughter-in-law—especially a girl who could play a piano, and was too fine to take her own chickens to market ; and that she was ready to say the same to Jane Tregarthen, of the Rye Farm, herself, whenever the question was asked her.'

'Poor Martin!' said Ethel, thoughtfully. 'No wonder he walks about in that dreary way.'

CHAPTER II.

'Let drops of water on the frozen snow
Fall gently ;
So with sweet words of love false pride will go,
Contently.'

MRS. TREGARTHEN had lately made the acquaintance of a neighbour ; for having taken note of the orderly manner in which the new miller and his wife appeared at church, and especially Mrs. Owen Ryce's 'respectable' attire, she made up her mind to call upon her.

'There is something I *like* about that family,' remarked Mrs. Tregarthen, with a knowing look in her quick, dark eye ; 'they don't put themselves forward to take my place in the parish, like old Mrs. Evan did ! Besides which, business *is* business, you know, Phil ! and that red wheat of ours turned out a better sample of flour than I expected it would from Llanarth Mill : then, Owen Ryce may be a handy customer to us by-and-by ! I hear he makes prompt payments.'

'Just like mother !' grumbled Phil, as he shut the gate after her : 'it is always money and money's worth ! How I hate it all ! Here, Rover, good dog, let's be off ! Quick !'

Mrs. Ryce was a quiet little woman whose greatest temptation in life was to be perfectly satisfied with every thing and every body. The sound of the dripping mill-wheel was music in her ears, and the arrival of each loaded waggon an unfailing interest as she worked and sang in the open window of the mill-parlour, her voice still fresh and clear as the sheep-bell on her native Cotswolds.

Soon after Mrs. Tregarthen's visit at Llanarth Mill, to which she had given all the importance due to the occasion, she vouchsafed an invitation to tea at the Rye Farm. This was refused rather gruffly by Owen Ryce himself, who resented the stiff wording of the letter; but, for the sake of business, he made no objection to his wife's desire to accept it; and with this pleasant consent, Mrs. Ryce added a pink ribbon to her best gray dress and set off joyfully to the farm.

Meanwhile Mrs. Tregarthen, having seen through the kitchen-door that Lena was toasting the muffins cautiously—just as she had directed her—walked briskly into the parlour and looked around. The glance she gave at the hard, green sofa, and the uneasy chairs to match, was satisfactory; the white cloth on the table, and the blue and gold china, highly so. The glass over the fireplace reflected a dress and cap that were, to say the least, 'becoming,' but not until she stood with folded hands

before the delight of her heart—her daughter's piano—did Mrs. Tregarthen's face really glow with pleasure, for this seemed to her far-reaching mind 'respectability' itself, and would no doubt impress Mrs. Ryce with the position she held in the neighbourhood! A very quiet knock at the door was almost startling in the midst of this reverie, and gave an undignified fluster to her manner as she shook hands with her friend.

'You were looking at your daughter's picture, I think,' said Mrs. Ryce, with kindly sympathy.

'Ah, yes!' said Mrs. Tregarthen, with a sigh. 'I do miss her. Yes! Esther is a good girl, Mrs. Ryce, and one that for education and manners a mother may be proud of; her poor father spared no expense, and that pi-anner cost five-and-forty pounds! *Five-and-forty* pounds, Mrs. Ryce!'

In-deed! What a sum 'to be sure! I should like to hear it, for I love music,—we often sing of an evening, father and I. As to Lizzie and Annie, they take first and second like birds; little Susie, too, will sometimes join in with them quite pretty.'

'Ah! I dare say,' said Mrs. Tregarthen, 'but it is the instrument I care for. "The March of the Men of Haarlech," or "Ap Shenkin,"—stirring music, Mrs. Ryce,—that is what suits me. But take a seat at the table, do. We can talk as well over our tea, and perhaps better.'

'Your Esther has been away from home a good many years, I understand?' said Mrs. Ryce, who was much exercised in her mind how it should come to pass that an only daughter could be spared so long.

'She has, indeed; and I may as well tell you first as last about it, for you are sure to hear some kind of a story. Esther was always a good girl to me—always—except in one thing, Mrs. Ryce, she took a fancy for that Martin Heath. Ah! you may well look astonished; but so it was, and it brought trouble enough with it. Of course it was no wonder to any one that Martin should have a liking for a good-looking girl, and a well-mannered girl like our Esther; but the very idea of her taking up with a low renter who can't write a letter or make out a bill fit to be seen, when we have spent so much on her education and manners, is enough to vex the best of us.'

'Well, it *is* a little surprising to me, Mrs. Tregarthen; Martin Heath is so dull and sad-looking. And yet he has a handsome way with him; he has done me more than one good turn already.'

'Very likely! He has done his best to bring *me* under obligations to him, but that he *never* shall; I am too wide awake for that!'

'How long has the fancy lasted?' asked Mrs. Ryce, whose sympathetic heart was fast enlisting itself on the side of the lovers.

‘Always, I think,’ replied Mrs. Tregarthen ; ‘for when Esther was but a child it was just the same. A new book—Martin must see it : some chickens hatched—Martin must hear the news. Then, as she grew older, they went nutting in the woods together, or there was the walk back from church. Ah, well ! it came to this at last, that he had the *face* to ask my consent to their marriage ! And I can assure you he heard a bit of my mind ; more, indeed, than I care to remember. If I get into an out-and-out passion, Mrs. Ryce, it makes me ill for days after.’

Mrs. Ryce pondered a good deal at this point of the conversation as to the kindest little wedge-like word she might here venture to insinuate. At length she remarked, in a thoughtful tone,—

‘Ah ! that accounts to me for a good many things I have heard about Martin Heath. It is *Esther* or *no one* for him, and I suppose you thought “out of sight out of mind !” but you know the old saying, “True love wants no new love ;” and perhaps it may apply to both of them.’

‘I was afraid that would be so at one time,’ replied Mrs. Tregarthen : ‘but I had a substantial help at last in the matter. Martin’s mother spied out the fancy, and very soon there was a fine disturbance at the Llydiatt. “No daughter-in-law for me !” she said,—“your own mother, or a wife,

which you like ; but the day you bring her to this house, you turn me out into the roads !” Just at that time, my sister in Kent lost the use of her arm, and as she took in lodgers and had a good home to take care of, she sent for Esther, and I let her go. I knew I should miss her at every turn ; but I sent her away, and she was willing to go,—old Mrs. Heath was so bitter against her and so hard on Martin—harder even than I was, and that is saying a good deal.’

‘I dare say,’ said Mrs. Ryce, putting another little wedge in deftly, ‘Esther would think, “Mother loves me through it all ; and when time has gone by and old Mrs. Heath’s bitter words are forgotten, she will think better of it for my sake.”’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mrs. Tregarthen, quietly ; ‘but when Esther went away she said, “Let me hear of Martin, mother. I shall never write to him, or he to me ; but I *cannot* forget him, and I am quite sure he will not forget me.” South-beach was a pleasant home for our Esther. I used to go and see her and my poor sister now and again ; and I have not had her home since. She plays the harmonium for the clergyman and teaches in the Sunday school,—indeed, he says she is helpful in many ways.’

Mrs. Owen Ryce’s face wore a puzzled expression. ‘Dear me ! Mrs. Tregarthen, I do hope my

Lizzie and Annie will never have to be transported from their home like your Esther, and she an only daughter !’

‘Well, now, Mrs. Ryce, there is more than one side to *that* question,—take some muffins, do,—you are a mother, and can enter into a mother’s wish for the well-doing of her family ; but it isn’t every girl that is such a good hand at music, nor are there many better-looking than our Esther.’

Mrs. Ryce raised her eyes to the picture over the piano, and with her head turned on one side, she put in another little wedge for her friend. ‘Yes ! but you know we mothers always think our children handsome ; and I must say that if you speak of features, you can’t find better in Herefordshire than Martin Heath’s. No matter how brown and shabby his old straw hat may be, he’s as handsome as Mr. Conway himself, only he’s dark instead of——’

Mrs. Tregarthen waved her hand impatiently, nevertheless the wedge had gone in a little further.

‘I do not say that his looks are not favourable,’ she replied, ‘but *there* it ends, Mrs. Ryce. Now, there is Edwin Kingsland, my sister’s husband’s second cousin, he owns a farm of 286 acres,—most of it hops, too,—well, *he* spoke up plain and straightforward the last time I was at Southbeach, and I gave him my leave to try and win Esther. You

see she is best where she is. Lena ! Lena ! some hot muffins directly ! Try some Scotch-bread till it comes, Mrs. Ryce.'

Once more Mrs. Ryce looked up to the picture over the piano.

'I am afraid I shall not see your Esther, except in the photograph,' she said ; 'therefore I must have a good look at her *that* way.'

Mrs. Tregarthen instantly took it down, and held it before the lamp.

'She has a gentle sort of look,' said Mrs. Ryce. 'Dark gray eyes, I see, and straight, well-formed features ; there's a kind of quiet, steady look about it, and the mouth gives me the notion she is a good business woman, like her mother. I should say she would know whether turkeys were worth 8s. 6d. or 9s.'

'Well, she might ; I can't say,' replied Mrs. Tregarthen, loftily : 'but I never sent her to market. She made up the butter, being a good hand at it ; but I always took the things in myself. I was not going to send her there, to be driven back by Martin Heath, and to have her baskets fetched and carried by the same person. But as to your not seeing Esther, Mrs. Ryce, I rather expect you will this very Christmas, for my sister's daughter is coming home from America, and there are other reasons, too, why I must have Esther back.'

Mrs. Ryce's wedge was a very thin one at this period, for she merely said,—

‘Indeed—yes!’

‘Phil does not take to the business as he ought,’ continued Mrs. Tregarthen; ‘he’s too fond of his gun and his ferrets, and is always lounging about the farm, with that Rover at his heels. I don’t like it, though he brings us a nice lot of rabbits, and wood-pigeons, and things. Esther may talk him over to more persevering ways about the farm. He used to mind her. I *should* be *put out* if a son of mine turned out lazy and good-for-nothing. Our roots are not half stored yet, Mrs. Ryce, nor half the wheat in; and his poor father would have worked day and night sooner than be so much behind.’

‘We walked round the Rye Farm last Sunday afternoon,’ said Mrs. Ryce, ‘and we thought the roots were excellent, so even; then we looked over the hedge at Martin Heath’s; *they* were all sizes and shapes. The Dyffryn is such poor land, he has turned his cattle into it, I hear.’

‘A fine herd they are to turn into any one’s field!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tregarthen. ‘There is not a “Herefordshire” among them; they are all Shorthorns, and no two alike. Who cares for Shorthorns when they can get thorough-bred Herefordshires? They take twice as long as ours

to grow, slow to feed, and in fact, Mrs. Ryce, they are like their master—there is no *get-on*—no “*push*” about them. Then he has a lot of poultry—Brahmas, and any out-of-the-way sort; though I never see him at market with them.’

Mrs. Ryce was ready with the friendly wedge.

‘Oh, but you know Martin is earlier astir than you are, and he sends them in by old Benjamin, so as to be first in the market. I thought he was pretty sharp over business.’

‘Ah, well!’ replied Mrs. Tregarthen, with a toss of her head, ‘I can’t say: but you know Martin Heath is *not* of our county; he comes from near the Cotswolds, and they are all slow of speech, and behind the times, up there. Whatever brought the Heaths into Herefordshire I cannot think; but a man ought to settle in his own native parts; he *don’t do here*, with his Shorthorns, and his Cotswolds, and his *bean-growing*! Our land is above such farming. Two sorts of crops in one field, indeed! A row of this and a row of that! I said to Phil last night, “If you think to take pattern by Martin Heath’s Gloucestershire ways, and let things get behind as you do, we shall soon have to sell the place, and go to Australia.”’

‘My mother was from Chipping Camden,’ said Mrs. Ryce, with a shadow of displeasure on her quiet face, ‘and I have never seen lovelier orchards

or pasture-land than there was round my old home. The hundreds of grand double Gloucester cheeses that used to go past our house to the station, were proof enough that a man could farm in the lower Cotswolds as well as he can up here round Pengethly.'

'So *you're* Gloucestershire, too!' said her neighbour, with less of respect in her tone than before. 'Then that accounts for your taking Martin Heath's part, through thick and thin, I see. Well, it's natural; but I hope Phil will never turn Cotswold farmer, and I hope things will mend. I have always told him *what* to do, and *how to do it*.'

CHAPTER III.

'Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense of service
which thou renderest.'

ESTHER had been home some time, but things had not mended with regard to Phil; neither did the 'time to speak' seem to present itself. Meanwhile Mrs. Tregarthen watched and listened, and at length grew impatient.

'I thought you would have had things out with your brother, long before this, Esther, my dear! However, I am going to stay from the service this

morning, on purpose that you may put the rights and the wrongs before him, as you walk over the fields together ; and I shall be rightly vexed if you fail me again.'

'I will do my best,' replied Esther, quietly ; but, alas ! Esther's best that day was a thorough failure. Phil had such an easy way of turning the subject, whenever he saw the direction it was taking ; and, to say the truth, the task was one she felt unequal to just then. She had seen nothing of Martin Heath since her return, and it disturbed her greatly to find he no longer occupied his old place by the transept arch. How she might advise Phil, or how she might best ask him the cause of Martin's absence, by turns were uppermost in Esther's mind, and kept her silent ; whether Martin had left the dear old church he used to love for the new Baptist chapel at the 'Twinings,' or whether he went nowhere ? They had nearly reached home before she ventured the question.

'I don't go to church myself very often,' replied Phil ; 'so how can I tell as to the chapel folk ? I should think Martin could never talk fast enough for them.' And he imitated his leisurely way of addressing the boys on a Sunday evening down at the Lower Llydiatt.

'Martin has not given up his Sunday class, then ?' said Esther, with a quick look of pleasure.

'The boys don't give him up,' said Phil, 'or maybe it would have dropped through. Martin has got slower, and more dreamy, than ever.'

Several days passed by, and still Esther saw nothing of Martin Heath, and still there had been no chance of getting a word in edgeways with Phil—nothing that might stir him up to mend his ways had ever come into her mind. Home was no longer the old home to Esther.

Mrs. Tregarthen had gone to bed early the second Sunday of her daughter's return, for 'sight is a gift to be taken care of,' she said sententiously, as she lighted her candle with a tract she had begun to read. 'This print is of no use to me; and then if you read aloud, I always go to sleep. So, good night, Esther, my dear, and mind you are up early, to get the cream ready for churning. I promised faithfully to send some fresh butter down to Llanarth Court before nine o'clock.'

'Now,' said Esther to herself, 'the time is come when I must speak to Phil;' and putting down her book, she said, quietly, 'Phil, dear, things don't seem to be going on very comfortably at home, I'm afraid.'

'Indeed!' replied lazy Phil; 'I thought they were; we have had some new cushions to the sofa, and a good truck of coal came in last week. I am quite content myself, now you are come back—especially so, Esther.'

‘Mother is not easy in her mind about the farm; and because of your fondness for a gun, instead of——’

‘Oh, bother!’ exclaimed Phil, standing up, and giving Rover a rough push from the fire. ‘I tell you what, Esther, if you listen to all mother’s fidgety notions, you will get just like her yourself,—always on the worry and fret. Work, work! that is all mother cares about. Well! she is often telling me to follow her example, and I’ll do it now; so good-night, Esther, and don’t look dismal. I’m right enough!’

The red dawn of early morning shone upon the frosty pane as Esther drew up the blind and looked out—looked out, it must be confessed—towards the Llydiatt Farm, to watch the smoke curling up through the dark old chimney-tree, and to think of Martin. It seemed so strange and sad to be at home again,—so near, and yet never to see him! Esther started, for she saw something she would fain not have seen—Philip, with his gun over his shoulder, crossing the field from Longacre Woods, Rover close at his heels. He stayed, as if debating whether he would take the short cut by Martin Heath’s home-meadow, or follow the longer path out into the road. A waggon was coming *that* way, and Phil turned quickly towards the Llydiatt Farm; he had neared the stile, when Martin came

leisurely out of the house. Phil looked up and made a sudden spring over the railing. Alas ! the slippery foot-plank gave way with a crash,—Esther could hear it plainly,—he had fallen backwards, and had made no attempt to rise !

She flew down the garden-path, and, passing through the old gateway to the farm, she met Martin face to face. Only a grave look of recognition from Martin Heath,—her friend of so many years ; and then he beckoned her to follow him. No word of welcome as they stooped together over poor Phil, and tried to lift him gently into an easier position.

Martin took off his coat and laid it under Phil's head. 'Run to the barn, Esther,' he said, 'and fetch old Ben and Tim. Let them bring the mattress off my bed, and some pillows.'

As soon as Esther was gone, Martin picked up a brace of pheasants and a hare which had fallen, together with the gun, and carried them silently into the house, where he covered them over with some meal-sacks.

It was not long before Phil himself was taken there, and laid on the floor in Martin's kitchen. They had hoped to get him placed in some comfort before Mrs. Tregarthen heard of the accident ; but few sights or sounds ever escaped the watchful eyes or ears of the mistress. Gates had slammed

at an unusual hour for gates to slam ; hurried feet had passed by, when a slow footstep only should have told that old Ben had gone to feed his horses ; Tim had gone out on Martin's pony and ridden quickly down the lane. Something was the matter ; and without waiting to inquire what, Mrs. Tregarthen was astir.

'Oh, Esther ! Phil hurt ! But you will take him home, of course. Martin Heath,—you will not—you *shall* not—take him into *your* house ! Oh, dear ! Phil, my poor boy, say you wish to go home !'

'Mother,' said Phil, with a groan, 'I cannot bear any more shaking ; leave me alone till the doctor has been. Lay me down, Martin—anywhere,—anywhere !'

'The doctor *is* here,' said a pleasant voice behind him. 'I came back on Tim's pony, and here I am ; all in good time, I hope. Let me see !' With quick glance Dr. Jeff took in the state of affairs, and gave his directions accordingly.

'We will place our patient so that the light may fall on——. Ah ! Heath, just move those potato-sacks, will you ? and make more room for the mattress, ahem ! You bachelors are not very particular about your floor, I see. Mrs. Tregarthen, perhaps you will get things a little straight, while I examine your son's leg ?' That excellent woman,

however, shook her head and sat gloomily on the edge of a chair, rocking herself to and fro.

'The idea of laying my poor dear boy on that dirty floor! she exclaimed, angrily; but while she sat there grimly bemoaning herself, Esther's ready hand had disposed of all that most distressed an orderly mind. Into one large basket she swept Martin's clothes, waiting for old Hannah Davis's washing-day; into another the bread and cheese left on the table; cups, plates—all unwashed—as quickly disappeared, and soon, like charity, Esther had covered a multitude of sins,—only, in so doing, she unfortunately left a door open which Martin had more wisely closed, and revealed, to Mrs. Tregarthen's dismay, a view of the staircase and the gallery above, along which a goodly row of corn-sacks had been piled, a store of new hay-rakes hung on the walls, and a rick-sheet spread itself over the banisters. 'My boy ought to come home, sir,' she said again, emphatically; 'this place is little more than a barn, and quite unfit for sick folk.'

'Pray be quiet, my good woman,' said Dr. Jeff. 'I must beg you to say no more. Nothing can be altered for your son's comfort in any way until his case is thoroughly examined and understood. Give me those scissors and kindly stand out of the light, Mrs. Tregarthen.'

'Oh, my poor Phil!' said that most aggrieved

and distressed of mothers, still rocking herself to and fro on the edge of her chair, 'to think of your lying on *that* floor!—I can't bear it! I can't *bear* it! Let me go! Let me go!'

'No one hinders you, my good woman,' said Dr. Jeff, eyeing her from under his spectacles. 'By all means go! Martin Heath, I think you had better take Mrs. Tregarthen home; she is unfit to remain with my patient at present.' Martin moved kindly towards her.

'I am *not* going to leave this place,' said Mrs. Tregarthen, in a very decided tone. 'I may not be *wanted* here, although I am Phil's own mother; but I will see him through it. . . . Ah, there is Mrs. Owen Ryce, good creature! I'm glad you've come, Mrs. Ryce; very glad. My poor dear Phil has fallen over a stile, or something, and broken his leg, and to think of his being brought *here*, of all places! I shall never get over it.'

'I dare say we can make ourselves useful,' replied Mrs. Ryce, cheerfully; 'it will take off the edge of your trouble, you know, to be doing something.'

'Aye, aye,' said Dr. Jeff, taking another quick glance from under his spectacles, 'we shall want a good many things from the Rye Farm, and you can direct your daughter and Mrs. Ryce where to find them; we cannot do without your

motherly hand here ;' and so, to Mrs. Tregarthen's own astonishment, she found herself down on her knees by Phil's mattress, assisting at the bandages, —up in a trice to fill the kettle for hot fomentations,—back again to give Phil a reviving draught.

And Esther's eyes grew large with glad surprise on her return to find her mother brightening the hearth, and showing herself in every way the handy woman that she was.

'Esther, my dear, send Lena with that piece of new matting from the store-room, just to lay before the fire and make it look a bit more comfortable for Dr. Jeff; and now poor Phil is quiet, take a duster to the shelves and that old bureau,—dear me, child, what a grand piece of furniture that would be if it were but clean !'

As Esther moved quietly about at her work, Martin looked in on his way to the fields; he felt strangely conscious of his ragged coat-sleeve and his loose, unstarched collar. What a contrast he was to her sweet face and trim, neat figure !

'What might have been, can never be now,' he said, 'and I am not worthy of my Esther, if ever I was.'

Phil slept long that afternoon, and Mrs. Tregarthen left Martin to keep watch while she and Esther made the promised butter for Llanarth Court. As soon as they were gone from the house,

Martin Heath crept quietly into the next room, uncovered the pheasants and hare so carefully hidden, and packed them up, directing them to Mr. Conway, and, with a great effort of mind and the help of Johnson's *Dictionary*, he wrote the word 'Perishable' on the label and enclosed this letter :—

'SIR,—I send you a brace of phazans and a hare, which was shot, and came to my hand this day, as I had promised you to look out. The like will not be done again, as I can certify and will hold myself responsible for. Signed, MARTIN HEATH.'

Presently Phil opened his eyes,—he had seemed to be asleep. 'What are you doing, Martin?'

'I am packing up that game to him it belongs to, Phil; and I have written a note to say that I can answer for the one who shot it, that it is the last time he will ever try for it on the Llydiatt Farm, without leave; and I signed it with my own name,—*yours* is not in it, Phil. Am I right? Can I answer for him?'

'Yes, Martin,' said Phil, slowly, 'I think you may.'

'That's right, my boy. You know I mean what I say; and it is quite certain sure that no one will know of this morning's work from me, unless I see you at it again: *then*, Phil, I *should* give your name up to Mr. Conway,—*not till then*.'

'Thank you so much,' said Phil; 'you've been a friend to me, Martin, and I shall never forget it.'

For a few minutes, sleep quieted the weary eyes, then, with a sudden start, Phil woke and called Martin to his side.

'You know that tree in the middle of Longacre Wood, where a gray cat, and some stoats, and a jay or two, are nailed up?' Martin nodded. 'Well, five trees back to the left there is an ivy stump, and on that, covered up with leaves, there are three partridges,—I shot them before I went into the wood,—will you find them and send them with the rest? Old Benjamin could come and stay with me till mother comes back; I only want to sleep. . . . Thank you, Martin; no brother could be kinder.'

Presently Martin crept quietly back, and, opening the hamper, made this addition to his note:—

'P.S.—Sir, I also enclose three partregs which have come to hand since. Yours, MARTIN HEATH.'

'Whatever does master want to ride out for at this time of night?' said Tim, in a grumbling tone, as he brought the black pony round; 'he's been to the doctor three times to-day and never had a feed!'

'What's that to you?' growled old Ben from the inner depths of the barn. 'If the master wants his own horse his own self, let him have it! I've no

patience with lads and their for'ard tongues,' he muttered, as he slammed the big door to and put the key in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

'And the cloud borne sunward ever nearer, nigher,
Ever floated onward towards the sunset fire.'

PHIL had been removed to his own home at the Rye Farm, and was slowly making some progress towards recovery; but as yet none had been made towards the renewal of Martin's old love for Esther, although Mrs. Tregarthen had not frowned upon him of late, and had even asked him to come and sit a bit with Phil of an evening.

Esther pondered much over this new sorrow—the change that had come over Martin, and everything connected with him—the quiet indifference of his manner towards her, and to everything—his home, his farm, his church.

'If I live on here with my mother,' she said to herself, 'where I must often meet with him, we ought at least to be friends. I will ask him the reason for this alteration—alas! I must own it—so much for the worse!' And, with this idea in her troubled mind, Esther went out to meet Martin

Heath the next time he inquired for Phil at the garden gate.

‘He is gaining strength, we think,’ said Esther ; ‘but you had better come in and see him yourself, Martin. He often asks for you ; and mother said last night she wondered you never came to see the poor boy now. Lena can tell you but little about him, and——’

‘Thank you,’ replied Martin, hastily turning to leave ; ‘but so that I know he is going on all right I am satisfied. I live my own life, Esther, and I am best away from the Rye Farm.’

‘That is as you think,’ answered Esther, feeling too much hurt to say more. ‘But there is one House, Martin, you ought never to forsake. I cannot tell you how grieved I was to miss you from your old place at church.’

Martin looked at her with surprise.

‘One place is as good as another, Esther, if we go to worship, and I left that place for no other reason. When you were going away to South Beach, I found that I was thinking more about the face I had lost from before me than the prayers I was joining in, so I looked out for a quiet corner where I could not see the Rye Farm pew, and I found one that suited me well by the belfry-door ; I could come in late and go out early without disturbing any one, and get a silent walk home over the fields.’

'I am glad of that, and yet sorry too that you shut yourself up so from all pleasant intercourse with your neighbours ; there is really some excuse for the strange things they say about you ; as for myself, I must confess the change has distressed me much.'

Tears were in Esther's eyes ; she could not trust herself to say more.

Martin looked away from Esther's face, far away to the golden sky, where the sun was setting, like a great signal-fire, on the Pendethly hills.

'Changed, am I ; and you are distressed by it ? What have I done to vex you ? Esther, I bear my own troubles in my own way ; *if* there is any change it is only outwardly.'

'O Martin ! there is no "if" about it—you are different—oh, so different, in every way ! Careless in your farm, in your dress, and in your home. How is it you have so changed that even I, your old friend, Esther, can hardly recognise you ?'

There was a long silence between them.

'It began, Esther,' he said at length, with a sudden effort to speak, 'by my hearing Mrs. Tregarthen say over the orchard hedge to Phil, "If our Esther marries young Kingsland, he has two hundred and eighty-six acres of his own, and most of it in hops, and she'll have as nice a home as any girl in England."''

‘Well, Martin, did you remember our last words before I went away, and smile at the idea?’

Martin looked away from the golden sunset, but he did not look at Esther. ‘That is what began it,’ he said; ‘and then I suppose my mother got to hear of it, for she worried me about it till I was almost beside myself, and raved at her for repeating such idle gossip: yet though I called it so, it burnt into my heart. I began at length to avoid seeing the neighbours, lest they should speak to me about it; and when my mother died, and Phil had told me it was a *settled thing*, I vowed no woman should enter into my doors, and I would live my life alone, and keep my trouble to myself.’

‘O Martin!’

‘Yes, it was a cowardly thing to do, Esther; I own it all; but I had been fretted for years with loud talking and vexing words, and I love peace too well not to try for it: at all events, by shutting myself up as I did, idle tales did not reach me about those I like best. Still it need not have made me so faithless, and disheartened, and careless, just because my little Esther had got a better home than I could give her.’

‘And you believed what people said in the village,’ exclaimed Esther, ‘and what that foolish boy Phil said in his boastful fashion, rather than what *we* said to each other when we parted, Martin?’

The great sun had gone down over the lowest slope of the hills, but the light of heaven seemed to be rising in Martin's heart, and shining in his dark eyes, as he looked into Esther's quiet and truthful face. It was long before he could speak.

'I am not fit to come near you, my little Esther,' he said ; 'unworthily I have met my trouble, and so I am unready to receive my joy.'

Martin glanced at his torn sleeve and at his hard, work-stained hand. He held it timidly towards her.

'Yet come back to me, my blessing, and lead me to a wiser and more useful life.'

Esther looked at him with an earnest pity in her glistening eyes, and giving him her hand, simply said, 'Martin, I will come.'

Then Martin came nearer, and with the grace true love bestows—no kindlier on the young lord who bends over the jewelled fingers of his lady—he kissed the little hand so dear to him, and was gone.

Philip Tregarthen was lying wearily on his uneasy bed that evening, when a step and voice he knew to be Martin's aroused him.

'Why, Martin, is that *you* ? I can hardly believe my own eyes. It is as much as a fellow can do to recognise you out of that old checked coat with the ragged sleeve ; it is almost the same as if Rover

were to change his shaggy hair for moleskin, and—well to be sure ! wonders never cease !—a dark blue tie, with a pin ! I might get over the tie, but the *pin* beats me *altogether*.'

'I have brought you a couple of pears and a newspaper,' said Martin, with that rare sweet smile of his. 'Shall I read to you a bit ?'

'Pears and a newspaper !' repeated Phil. 'All I can say is, many happy returns—pears and all !'

'Well, I will begin about the second page ; I can get on fast enough in that line ; it is letter-writing that sets me fast ; my old father used to say I wanted another quarter's schooling.'

'Read away,' said Phil ; 'only don't be offended if I go off to sleep.'

Martin read, it must be owned, in rather a monotonous tone, and the result was, as Phil had expected—a sound and refreshing sleep. The newspaper was gently laid down, and then—oh, surely it was a godsend to him !—Mrs. Tregarthen herself came in at that moment, and sat down in the arm-chair with her knitting, so that Martin could tell her his errand, and plead his own cause, with greater chance of being listened to than he had ever hoped for.

'Well,' she said at length, after narrowing once, knitting three rows, narrowing again, and frowning over the needles as if they were determined to

drop all the stitches whether or no, 'I don't give my consent, mind! for I always said that I never would, but I suppose you must take my Esther. Oh, dear! to think of father giving five-and-forty pounds for a pianner to stand among Martin's meal-sacks!'

A low laugh made them look up.

'So that is it, Martin?' said Phil. 'I can understand things a little better now,—the pin, you know; and—let me see—what was it you were reading when I went to sleep? The price of potatoes was it that you were to sell so as to make room for Esther's piano! But I won't talk any more nonsense; shake hands, Martin—my brother now, and a good brother you have been to me already.'

'May I speak to Esther?' asked Martin.

Mrs. Tregarthen nodded. She was glad to talk this trouble over with Phil, but her tears fell fast over her knitting.

'What are you fretting at now, mother? Why, you'll never have had such enjoyment in your life, as you will have when you are turning out Martin's household goods—sulky old clocks and worm-eaten chests—buying fenders, and fire-irons, and "fiddle-faddles," for our Esther; besides which, Martin has a new landlord, and he is going to repair and smarten up the house till we shall hardly know it.'

'It is no use, Phil,' said Mrs. Tregarthen;

'trouble is my lot. Esther might have had as good a home as any girl in England.'

'Down in *Kent*,' replied Phil; 'where you'd never have seen her, except once a-year or so. Now you'll be able to speak to her out of your own window.'

'There is something in *that*, Phil,' said Mrs. Tregarthen, with a very slight concession in her tone.

'Then,' said Phil, 'if I don't get strong enough to walk about the farm as I used, there will be Martin close by,—your own son-in-law, you know. You can tell *him* what to do and how to do it, mother; perhaps he'll take advice better than I did.'

'There is something in *that*, Phil,' said Mrs. Tregarthen, with still more concession in her tone; 'but no Shorthorns, mind, I stick to the Herefordshires.'

'By the time you have got the house comfortable and Esther settled,' continued Phil, 'you might turn it over in your mind whether you would like to hear her play the new organ in church. I heard you say once to our Vicar, that if Esther were at home you would spare her on a Sunday to help in the choir.'

'Well, Phil, my dear boy, there's a great deal in what you say; and if there has been much to say

against it, there certainly is something to be said *for* it.' Here the much-consolated mother bustled out of the room to see Lena, and order a neat little tray to be got ready for supper.

'I will make a Welsh rabbit and cut up the cold chicken, then you can dress it with parsley—four pieces, and one in the middle. We will have the cocoa to-night in the Wedgwood with fern-leaves on it, and you can reach down some of those best mince-pies. . . . A clean cloth, remember,' said Mrs. Tregarthen, turning back again; 'and oh! do you know where Miss Esther is, Lena?'

'She is in the front parlour with Mr. Heath,' said Lena, opening her eyes very wide, and looking wise above her years.

'All right,' replied her mistress, pleasantly; 'I hope there is a good fire.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Lena, promptly; 'I do *think* there is: shall I take some dry wood in to cheer it up, though?'

'N . . . no; I will look in myself, presently.'

When Lena next saw her mistress, she was closing the front-parlour door after her; tears were in her eyes, but a good broad smile on her face, as she said,—

'Child, you can lay the supper in Master Phil's room; it will be more cheerful and sociable to be all together this evening.'

CHAPTER V.

'To lean our heart upon another heart,
In love that neither life nor death can part,
So seek we still to end our life's long quest,
For only in true love we find true rest.'

'THE prospect of a journey to Scotland is most delightful!' said Ethel Conway, as in lazy mood she turned over the guide-books, lists of hotels, and maps, which covered the library table; 'all but this necessary, yet tedious part of it; and I feel so perfectly bewildered by the different routes we have already proposed, that I must leave the final decision to your own judgment, my dear Harold, and retire to this luxurious chair with the Hereford paper. It will rest my overtaxed mind to read who won the last prize at the Bow meeting and who supplied the cake for St. Rudolph's school-treat.'

'That being the case,' replied Harold, 'I must claim a promise beforehand, that you will be satisfied with the result, whether it may be Iona, or the Shetland Isles, or——'

'Oh! *more* than satisfied, Harold. But what have we here?' Ethel started up. 'This must be our friend Martin! Listen:—

"On the 30th inst., Martin Heath, of the

Llydiatt, Herefordshire, to Esther Mary, only daughter of the late John Tregarthen of the Rye Farm, Llanarth.”’

‘Certainly, it is our worthy tenant,’ replied Harold; ‘and I hope that Peace will not only rest in those thoughtful eyes of his, but shine on all the actions of every-day life, which have hitherto been seen but in shadow.’

‘I hope so, indeed,’ replied Ethel, earnestly. ‘And now, to turn from the sentimental to the practical, what wedding present shall we devise? I am always in a state of doubt whether a time-piece, or a butter-dish, or handsome vases, will not have been selected by every other friend.’

Harold looked up mischievously from the map he was tracing. ‘I do not think, under the circumstances, you could offer a more suitable gift than a tea-pot, Ethel, or kettle!’

Ethel laughed, ‘To remind Martin of the difference between past and present, I suppose; his old, black smoked one and a shining new electro! What could be a greater contrast! But fancy the work having been all completed at the farm by this time, and that even the piano has emigrated! There seemed so much to do when we last saw the Llydiatt.’

‘So there was,’ replied Harold, ‘but with such a happy end in view as a wedding, what will not a

man be induced to accomplish? After our return from Scotland, we will go and see what *we* think of the change at the Llydiatt.'

'That will be charming,' said Ethel, 'and, above all, to find a real Mrs. Heath after my late experience of Martin's home without her.'

A few months passed away—all too quickly for Ethel—and then the time came for the fulfilment of Harold's promise; the old enjoyments of the winding roads and steep hillsides of Herefordshire were renewed, and Ethel declared that the Penedthly hills had a beauty of their own not to be found even in Scotland. She would have added more, but a pair of dark eyes recognised her over the muslin blind of the Rye Farm parlour window, and Mrs. Tregarthen began a series of welcoming nods which were only exceeded by the depth of Lena's curtsy over her pattens and Phil's quick descent from a wheat-rick to open the new gates of the Llydiatt.

'Here we are again, Martin,' said Harold, 'and heartily glad to see you looking so bright and happy.'

'Thank you, sir!' and Martin's quiet face lighted up with kindly greeting as Ethel had never seen it light up before,—no April sun to be soon overcast, but the calm, steady glow of summer.

Mrs. Heath had seen them from the little porch, and while Martin started with Harold for a survey

of the farm and buildings, she conducted Ethel into the house, with evident pleasure in her home.

'I dare say you will hardly remember *this* room, Mrs. Conway, it used to be so black with smoke, and——' Esther coloured as she recalled the word she might have used. 'It was so *dark*, too, before the bay-window was put in, and I think the squares of red and black tiles make it cheerful and fresh.'

'You are right,' said Ethel; 'the room is changed from night to day. Is it possible that here was the dingy corner where I had my smoked cup of tea? And is this grand old clock my worn-out old friend that was so utterly unable to strike twelve?'

Esther smiled.

'That is my mother's work,' she replied. 'See! it has a new face and a new case! And the settle, too, has got quite a handsome polish. Martin expected I should banish them all; but I love old-fashioned things.'

'The room had a curious little window in it, I remember,' said Ethel.

Yes, there it was; only the sun was shining through a pale yellow and gold casement, which laid a bright chequer pattern on the floor. A pot of mignonette took the place of the motley collection of things on the ledge, and the sweet scent

followed them into the parlour, to which Esther quietly led the way.

This room was the pride and delight of Mrs. Tregarthen's heart, for there the most respectable of pianos rested its feet on an Axminster carpet; and there, too, was to be seen, on a set of black and gold shelves, the family china—blue of the deepest and gold of the richest—a legacy from Esther's aunt. Martin's arm-chair, re-covered and studded with brass nails wherever space allowed, and Esther's low wicker chair, were placed temptingly by the cheery wood fire, where a bright copper kettle was singing its welcome, and a small tea-tray and some daintily cut bread-and-butter waited till called for.

Ethel took up Esther's knitting. 'Something warm for your husband, I see!' she said, with a smile.

'Yes,' replied Esther, 'I am knitting him a waistcoat with sleeves, for extra-cold days. Martin has been careless of his health for the last few years, and he gets a touch of the Hereford complaint, rheumatism, sometimes.'

'You find a good husband is worth taking care of,' said Ethel: 'I am sure I do.'

'Indeed I do, Mrs. Conway! Martin and I are very happy.'

'And yet, Esther, when I look round your well-

ordered house, the very perfection of neatness, I much wonder how you have contrived to instil your notions into your husband without worrying him with the change,—coming in from the fields with his farm-boots on, and—and——’

It was Ethel’s turn to colour up now, and Esther’s face had such a comical expression on it that she burst into a merry laugh.

Esther laughed heartily, too, as she related her own experiences and difficulties. ‘But, oh dear! Mrs. Conway,’ she said, ‘I knew Martin and his worth so well, and I felt that all I grieved over in him was just an outside blemish from his bringing up, you know, and from his ignorance of house-keeping and his troubles; and it was my duty, as well as pleasure, to make up for his failings, as he makes up for mine in other things.’

‘I never said anything to him about changing his habits,’ continued Esther; ‘I thought a good deal about it and decided that I would leave it alone. But you see we are never far apart, and it is “Esther, I want this,” or, “Esther, can you find me that?” so I am always ready with it, and from the *same* place. He thinks it wonderful that it should be so, but he is beginning to get into the way quite naturally; still, I think he will often be a bit of a rummager and leave a drawer half open with ends of string and things hanging out.’

'It is no great hardship to meet that little difficulty; is it, Esther?' said Ethel; 'he leaves the drawer open with his right hand and his other self shuts it with her left.'

'That is it, Mrs. Conway; but do you know I was afraid Martin would have been vexed and hurt when the workmen came, and there was such a turn-out of his things; mother *would* make such a talk and a—"Dear me!" and "Well, I never did!" But Martin went quietly off into the fields, and I knew, if I could keep quiet too she would like the place better, and feel more interest in it; so I took to this room, and made the curtains, and covered the sofa, while mother had the pewter down and the shelves, and polished and scrubbed the furniture. Then, when Martin gave her the key of his mother's oak-chest, and she had to unpack the stores of house-linen, and have a *great wash*, she got into wonderful high spirits. Phil said he had never seen her so happy in his life.'

'I can quite realise the scene,' said Ethel, as in lazy mood she put down her own work and watched Esther's busy knitting-needles. The movement was quickly noted by the kindly hostess.

'May I make the tea now?' she asked.

Ethel was quite ready to enjoy Esther's hospitality; and how she contrasted it with her former experience at the same place may be well imagined.

'It seems to me,' she said, at length, 'that on a bright summer day like this there is nothing to equal the sunny glow over those corn-fields, or the dark, soft shade of those woods. Every sound is delicious and sweet—from the wood-pigeons in the fir-tree to the dainty tapping of that banksia-rose on the open window-pane. But oh, Esther! what a dreary place it must be in winter—so inaccessible and so dull!'

'Oh, no!' said Esther, simply; 'we have a large dairy, you know, and plenty of busy housework; then on Wednesdays we have a night-school—Martin, Phil, and I. Sometimes the curate comes in to help us; we all work together, and are very happy. Friday there is a choir practice. I play the organ at the church now, and Martin is learning tenor, so I teach him most nights. We don't want to put ourselves forward,' Esther added, quietly, 'but until some one will take the office, Martin has agreed to be churchwarden; and he has made several improvements already. The bells were so sadly jangled, and the ringers had got so careless about chiming on a Sunday, that Martin has taken to ringing himself, and started some good rules. Now it is all well-ordered, and our bells are worth hearing. I take care that the belfry is kept clean and neat, and the church too. Oh, there is nothing like having plenty to do to keep oneself bright and happy!'

A knock at the door interrupted Ethel's ready assent.

'If you please, Mrs. Tregarthen's compliments, and she has sent some fresh-laid gallinæ eggs for Mrs. Conway, and would she call?'

Lena's face beamed with the grand liberality of the gift, as she placed the basket on the table and curtsied her way to the door.

'Presently I will come,' said Ethel, who wished to say another word or two about Martin. 'Looking back upon it all, Esther, I dare say you see things in a very different light; for even those we know best are sometimes seen to us in shadow, and we want the sunshine of faith to understand them.'

'You are right, Mrs. Conway,' said Esther, gravely. 'I see clearly enough *now*, that I was greatly in the wrong. I had never doubted Martin's sincerity—*that* would have been impossible; but I was hurt and angry at the opposition from his mother and mine. "I will stay here," I said, "in South Beach, until I am asked to come back!" I did not understand Martin's patience, or his strange humility, or realise that he should think for a moment I was too good for him! The idea seemed simply absurd that he should expect any other to take *his* place to *me*. I had sent him no token, because I had said in my pride I could trust Martin's love without any such sign; and he, too,

was silent. Then, after his mother's death, I would not come, although my own mother wished it, lest any should say I had come back to take Mrs. Heath's place at the Farm. Ah, yes, Mrs. Conway, I can see plainly enough now the widening of the distance between us, and that there was only one narrow footway which *bridged* it—our daily remembrance of each other in our prayers : we never omitted that ; and it was a pathway over which all the follies, and jealousies, and uncertain feelings that love brings might pass away, as well as a sweet and strong resting-place for Faith. I have much pride to repent of, and much faith to be thankful for.'

'Yes,' said Ethel, quietly,—


“ Repentance, dark with shadowy recollections,
Faith, white and pure with sunniest affections,
But both, across the sun-besilvered tide,
Help to the haven where the heart would ride.” ’

HOW JOHN MERRIVALE CHOSE HIS WIFE.

By E. M. L.

CHAPTER I.

'I wait for my story, the birds cannot sing it
Not one—as he sits on the tree ;
The bells cannot ring it ; but long years, O bring
Such as I wish it to be.' JEAN INGELOW.

 HERE is no place so picturesque as Forest Lodge ; not even the old Hall itself, with its massive portico, battle-mented front, and carved-stone urns—dark and solemn, as if they contained the ashes of generations ! Shadows linger there, and follow down the ancient avenue, but through the wide entrance-gates sunshine comes at will.

Here it rests on the grim stone-work, and the glistening ivy becomes a dainty vestment. There it shines on the urns standing darkly over the gateway, and the golden lichen flashes into a crown ; while close by stands the Lodge, all a-glow with light, and warmth, and colour. Light—shining

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on the oriel window and its frame-work of clematis. Warmth—resting on the quaint twisted chimneys, and the martins' nests under the eaves. Colour—dancing on the walls and roof wherever the summer roses could reach and nestle.

John Merrivale, leaning over Aunt Susan's garden-gate, glanced merrily at the picture before him. A happy line of thought played round his eyes—dark, bright, wise-looking eyes they were!—it curled away in the smoke which fitfully left his pipe; it wandered into a pleasant smile, and changed into suppressed laughter, as he said to himself with sudden energy,—

‘I must try by some test or other, and if that is an odd one, what does it matter?’ John laughed again. ‘To think of choosing my wife by the way she keeps the back stairs at the Hall! It does seem comical; but Aunt Susan often says, “Never look at the polished front; go round to the back, and if you find a clean door-step there, you’ve got a treasure.”’ That last word set him dreaming again, as he lingered there half listening to the bells calling for evening service, and half watching for a shadow to pass the gateway.

‘I’ve been too long making up my mind to have a real fancy now, some people say, and I don’t know; but one thing I am sure of, a slatternly wife would put an end to all my ideas of a happy home.’

Very wise, but rather sly of John; for the woodman's pretty daughter—Lilly Patterson—was coming that evening to the Hall, and he knew well enough that it would be her duty to keep the attics and back-stairs clean. He had often noticed her fresh pink gingham dress, with its neatly crimped frill, and the white well-starched sun-bonnet, to say nothing of the dainty blue muslin worn on Sunday, carefully chosen, and as carefully made. So John Merrivale, 'wise in his own conceits,' pleased himself with the fancy that he could already see the spotless stairs and the well-kept rooms under Lilly's charge, with the more distant, but sweeter picture, of the bow-window before him, and that same white sun-bonnet peeping out from the clematis to welcome him as he came home from work.

Aunt Susan was getting tired of keeping the Lodge alone, and her kind old master had promised John should take her place by-and-by.

'Remember, though,' said Mr. Percy, with a pleasant smile, 'old Susan has always had a clean door-step and a bright knocker. I should not like a change for the worse in that respect, either for your sake or mine. Take your time, John,—take your time. When you think of settling down in a house of your own, it is not so easy to choose a wife—a *good* wife—as you may think.'

'Famous advice, I dare say,' said John Merrivale

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to himself, as he woke up from his reverie with a start. 'Why, there is old master himself coming down the drive on his black pony, and the chimes are over! Lilly is late.'

Just then old Susan, shading her eyes, looked up the avenue, and, with careful measure of time and distance, so as to ensure no breathless and unseemly haste, made the descent of the three doorsteps, ready at the exact moment, with low curtsy and open gates, for her master's welcome greeting.

'Ah, Sir,' she never failed to say, when she knew the old church was his destination, 'my heart goes where my feet will never carry me any more.' And then she listened for the cheering words that always came.

'Never mind, old friend; never mind. It is heart-service that is the *best* service; so you can be with us after all.'

Susan was slowly closing the gates, when little Annie Scott, from the lower Lodge, passed quickly by towards the church. With kindly thought she stopped. 'These gates are heavy; let me shut them for you, Mrs. Merrivale,' and Annie took hold of the massive handle, turning it with both hands and a good will.

'What a hurry you are in! please let *me* come through *first*,' said a voice close to them.

'Why, you're going the wrong way!' said the old

lady ; 'it is church-time, or near upon it ; surely you've forgotten it's Wednesday ?'

At this moment John sauntered slowly up. 'You're late, Lilly ; I've been waiting for you this half-hour.'

'I didn't ask you to,' said Lilly, rather offended at John's manner ; 'but as mother says the Hall is shut up on service-night, and every one expected to go to church, I may as well go on with you.'

'Very good,' said John, gravely ; 'you can go back after service with Mrs. Green and the others, and I will take the lower road to the Glen Cottage and fetch your things.'

'Thank you,' said Lilly, in a better mood. 'Mind you take care of that box, John ! I've got a new bonnet ; and I don't believe there's a prettier one in the village—you tell me if there is !'

'I know there's not a prettier face to look out of one,' thought John, as he walked slowly down the avenue that night, thinking of her words and carefully bringing Lilly her treasure ; thinking, too, how wisely he had settled his fancy at last. 'It's only to take notice of little habits and ways, and then it's easy enough to find a good wife. Aunt Susan has often said to me, "Little signs show great finds," and one thing is very certain, Lilly is careful of her clothes, and I'm not afraid to let my choice rest on the way she turns out her work.'

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Aye, even the stairs Mrs. Percy never walks down, and the boards that black silk of hers never sweeps.'

Some weeks passed by before John began to doubt his own wisdom. He had wilfully ignored Lilly's work, and looked only at her pretty face and lively manners; but very grave doubts gradually crept into his mind, harassing and troubling him. It was on a bright October morning that 'Good Sense' first came to the rescue—a very dull and sunless day that one seemed to John. Thought and work were so busily hindering each other that nothing went well. The mowing machine rebelled at every dried grass stalk; and when John had righted the screws he forgot where he was going to, until reminded by the sudden opening of the study window, and—

'Mind, John! mind! you'll cut off my spiræa in another second!' reached his ears.

'Never saw John so careless in all my life!' said Mr. Percy, as he closed the window. 'Dear! dear! that rose-coloured spiræa was saved by a hair's breadth!'

Soon after this another window was quietly raised, and without a glance John knew very well who was looking out from it; but 'Good Sense' whispered to him for the first time, 'Go on steadily with your work, and take no notice of that white sun-bonnet waved towards you by one of its strings.'

At length he heard a voice which obliged him to look up. 'John! I say John! Listen, I want you. There's such a nice red apple on the top of the tree just below; knock it down for me, there's a good fellow!'

John shook his head, and went on with his work, only when he emptied the next boxful of grass he said, 'You'd better get on with your work, Lilly; you've been at that window more or less this half-hour, and you will hear the one o'clock bell ring before you're ready, if you don't mind.'

'How stupid you are, John! Don't begin to lecture. I want that apple.'

'I dare say,' said John, turning his machine round one of the sweeping conifers with some energy.

'Well, I thought you had a bit of politeness about you at one time; however, I see I was mistaken,' said Lilly, pertly. But still she stayed in the sunny window, and still she looked down on the red apple as it swayed to and fro in the morning breeze. 'Stupid old John! I wish you were gone!' sang Lilly; half leaning out of the window to catch his attention.

John could hear this, and a great deal more too, not sung in his praise by any means; but a second whisper from 'Good Sense' came to the rescue, 'Take the machine out of view from that window, and leave the vexation behind you.'

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‘Not a bad plan either,’ said John.

‘Oh!’ a sudden thought stayed the singer, and the sharp, stinging words, she was uttering, ‘I know how I can get the apple and vex “Old Careful” too;’ and picking up John’s best Sunday boots—for Lilly was supposed to be cleaning his room at that moment—she cautiously threw them down on the apple-tree, and having succeeded in shaking off the fruit, down she ran to pick it up, and returned to finish her work. It was not a good apple after all, so that half of it was put down on the window-sill and left, while Lilly once more looked out, and the one o’clock bell rang all too soon.

That evening it rained heavily, and the morning came—Sunday morning, too—with a cloud on John Merrivale’s face, a pair of soaked boots in one hand, and half a red apple in the other. ‘This is your doing, Lilly,’ he said, and John looked more sad than angry, for the picture he had framed with such certainty of its enduring brightness was fast fading from before his eyes.

Yes; John Merrivale had heard and seen, day by day, enough to convince him that Lilly was both careless and heartless, and the time came at length when Mrs. Percy herself expressed the same, with displeasure.

‘Cobwebs here, and cobwebs there, and dirt

everywhere!’ John heard her say, as she came down the back-stairs, holding up her dress as if it had been a muddy road. ‘Lilly Patterson, unless you change from this very day, and take more pains with your work, you will not do for me.’

Poor John Merrivale walked slowly up the dirty stairs himself, counted the cobwebs in the corner, and said with a sigh, ‘Lilly Patterson will *never* do for me, either.’

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Lilly was gone—for she gave notice that day—she was succeeded by a tall, dark-eyed girl, from the village, plain in face, and as plain in manner; but Rachel Keane had a determined fight with the spiders, and there was no mistake about the style in which she kept the department allotted to her. Every one in the house knew where she was and to what her energies were applied. Every one! No, not her old master; the sound was new and disturbing that penetrated the double baize door of his study.

‘What is all this noise? this tremendous knocking?’ inquired Mr. Percy, as quiet Mary Graves answered his rather unquiet bell.

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‘It is only Rachel Keane, sir, brushing the back-stairs,’ replied Mary, the calm-mannered housemaid. ‘She has been a little put out this morning, and——’

‘Indeed! has she? so have I by her insufferable noise! Go at once, Mary, and show her how to use a brush. I should have said it was a hammer, and not a very light one either. What! afraid of Rachel Keane already? Send her to me then, or—stay—’ said he, gradually losing courage himself for a scene, ‘let cook speak to her; Mrs. Green is the proper person of course, to do so. I understand it was by her advice that Rachel came here.’

John sorely repented his old bargain made under the beech-trees, as he saw Rachel’s well-finished work, and at the same time marked her ill-tempered face; he was as anxious now to see a cobweb, or to find an unwashed step, as he had been to ignore either in Lilly Patterson’s days. ‘This Rachel is dreadfully clean, there is no doubt about it,’ said John; ‘but that is not everything; and I’ll wait a month before I own my test has been a failure.’

Long before that time some furniture had to be removed from the upper store-rooms, and the stairs were soon covered with bits of matting, straw, and dirty foot-marks. Rachel had only just finished cleaning the last step when the packers arrived with their muddy boots, caring for nothing but how

best to convey these goods to the next train ; not even seeing the white stairs, or making the smallest allusion to the condition of the roads after the thaw, and the amount of clay that had been left by them.

To see Rachel's black eyes flash, and to hear her angry voice, was to see and hear what would not soon be forgotten at Forest Hall. 'Clean those stairs again ! No, I won't ! no ! not if they stay like that till Christmas !'

Mrs. Percy's was the voice that replied to her, for Mary and Mrs. Green with united effort had failed to quiet her. 'Hush, Rachel, you forget yourself ! Besides which, you had notice that the packers were coming, and have wilfully given yourself double work.'

But Rachel would not be hushed by the kindest mistress in the world ; and before many weeks were over she had gone—in search, we may suppose—of a place that never would get a dirty foot-mark except on a proper day and at a convenient hour.

John Merrivale recovered his spirits rapidly from this time, indeed he had begun to call his failures 'good escapes,' and his test 'a little joke ;' but he was glad he had not made cook a 'confident' about either, especially when she said to him very solemnly,—

'John, I've got the right girl at last. . Margaret

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Summers is coming this week in Rachel's place ; and if ever a good servant and pleasant companion is to be found, Margaret's the one. You'd hardly believe it, but mistress didn't take to her, and I had much ado to get leave to engage her.'

John now made up his mind to run no risks about the choice of a wife depending on '*a mere joke.*' Nevertheless he could not help keeping a sharp look-out on the testing stairs ; and within three weeks of Margaret's arrival he took note of a well-washed middle to each step, and a gradual *shadow* into the corners, where, day by day, a little heap collected and filled them up. To make quite sure, he spilt some bran on the top step, which soon found its way into a place of safety and there remained.

'I knew I was right !' said John boldly to himself, as he held his candle to the stairs in order to find signs of bran or no bran. 'I knew I was right! These stairs will prove as good to me as a fortune-teller. Margaret Summers will never go to Forest Lodge for my asking, that's certain.'

Not long after this, Margaret was required at home. She had been careless over her work, but careful to please cook, so that she, at all events, was sorry to lose her. But John only said, 'I've learnt a lesson or two lately ; and one is, that to be a good servant wants faithful care in little things,—

once make sure of that, and I could soon find a good wife.'

'Why, John !' said Mrs. Green, 'you do surprise me ! I never thought you saw anything to admire in Margaret !'

'And I *never did* !' replied John, with energy.

Cook turned away to the window and began to dust the leaves of a scarlet geranium. She felt rather vexed with John ; but the next moment she put up her hands and exclaimed in breathless haste, 'Just think of *that* ! Look there ! would you believe it ! ! *Come here ! I say ! John !* That morsel of a child, Annie Scott, is coming up to the house with a carpet-bag ! You may depend upon it she is going to take Margaret's place, and Mrs. Percy has never so much as said, "What do you think of it, cook ? would Annie Scott suit ?"'

John looked out and laughed heartily, 'without any reason,' Mrs. Green said, 'except to be vexatious.'

But the very gentle knock at the door had to be answered, and the small, very small person, had to be admitted ; and then cook saw before her a dainty little figure clad in a warm, brown home-spun. A pair of large, soft, brown eyes looked up into her face, and then shyly let the brown straw hat, with its one ornament of a pretty velvet bow, shade them again ; for Mrs. Green had not been taken

into confidence this time by her mistress, and it seemed as if she could only look at Annie unsparingly, and exclaim, 'Well! to be sure!' or, 'Well! I never could have believed it,—to think my mistress should not have said *one* word to me when I as good as chose the last three! for I suppose you are come to *try* service at the Hall?' added Mrs. Green in a severe tone.

'Yes, if you please,' replied Annie, quietly; 'Mrs. Percy is going to let me try if I can manage the work. I shall be pleased to do my best; I always loved Mr. and Mrs. Percy.'

'Ah!' (cook subsided a little); 'you're young!'

'Not *very*,' said Annie, simply; 'I shall really be eighteen my next birthday; but I can work, Mrs. Green. What shall I do now, please?'

Cook laughed this time. 'Do? Well, you are in a hurry to begin, but you must have some breakfast first, and——'

'I had my breakfast two hours ago,' said Annie, taking off her hat and folding up a pair of warm gloves; 'we are always early people, and mother thought you might want me in good time, from what Mrs. Percy said. I hope I did not come too soon.'

'Certainly I am likely to be busy to-day,' replied cook, softening in her rather aggrieved tones, 'so you may as well help me a bit now. To-morrow

you can clean the back-stairs; they want it badly enough.'

And now it was John's turn to laugh again.

'You had better think well over such an undertaking as *that*,' he said, looking at Annie's slender fingers; 'there is the bucket of water to carry, and the brush, all the way up to the top. Seventeen steps, mind, to say nothing of cobwebs that have to be taken down! Lint and bran, too, have been playing at "puss-in-the-corner" so long, you'll have something to do to catch them.'

A wondering smile passed over Annie's face, but she made no other reply to John's curious remarks.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT do you think of Annie Scott for our under-maid's place?' asked cook, a few days after her first arrival, quite ignoring the cold reception she had given her. 'I'll tell you what *I* think, John Merrivale,—she'll make a first-rate servant; she is as like what I was at her age as you can well imagine; she knows how to use a brush very near as well as I did, and she can almost give as good a finishing touch to the grate,—then her dress is so neat!'

‘Very likely,’ replied John, with a sly look at Mary Graves; ‘but I never can see Annie with her sleeves tucked up to the elbow and a large holland apron and bib on, without a laugh; it’s so comical to see a bit of a thing like she is turn out her work as well as a woman of forty. As to her dress, she reminds me of that little brown hazock out there on the lawn,—she’s here and there, and you never hear her fly.’

Looking at Mrs. Green’s heavy figure, it was rather a stretch of imagination to suppose that in that respect, also, Annie was the very type of herself thirty years ago!

John began to poke the fire rather vigorously. ‘Tis to be hoped,’ he said to himself, ‘that Annie will not grow up altogether like cook in the matter of self-praise.’ Still it was a handsome acknowledgment on the part of that experienced individual, and John felt from that moment there had been no failure on Annie’s part—unwittingly as she played it—in the crucial test. Nevertheless, when he met her that day at the foot of the celebrated stairs, he could not resist asking her whether she was satisfied with her work, or whether she thought it might be improved.

‘I am afraid it is *not* quite as well done as Mrs. Green would like, but she is going to give me a hint about whitening boards. The corners, you

see, are so dark-looking, I was obliged to take my pocket-knife to them.'

'I dare say. Did you find any bran?' he asked. 'Margaret was not bran-clean, you know.'

Annie thought he must be laughing at her, and with a puzzled face she said,—

'I've heard of "bran-new," but I never heard of "bran-clean." I don't understand you, John; but I can't stay to talk now, because of my work.'

'That is quite true,' said John Merrivale, and his thoughts added, 'Yet a time will come, I fancy, when I shall have something to say to you that I shall want to be answered; for, clear as the light I can see my picture again; and though I don't see a white sun-bonnet through that clematis, I see a pair of sweet, brown eyes—honest eyes, too—and a bright, kind heart, looking through them. . .'

A nearer view of John's picture shows it was in truth a pleasant one, but it was not realised without a dark shadow first passing over it. A day had come when the Lodge-gates were no longer under old Susan's charge; a day when her old master himself came to open them, waiting there with head uncovered, while a little band of mourners, followed by all the servants from the Hall, passed out, carrying Susan to her last resting-place. A sweet smile lighted up Mr. Percy's quiet face, as

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he closed the gates after paying her this last honour, for he well knew that her Heavenly Master had opened wide the doors of the Eternal City for her faithful feet to enter, and that she would go out no more for ever.

This autumn shadow had been followed by a hopeful spring, and now the full sunshine of summer's sweet beauty rests on the picture as John came cheerily down the avenue towards his home.

The white-sanded door-step and shining knocker might bespeak no change to other eyes, but to John himself everything before him was graced with a fresh beauty. Even the row of pewter plates on the shelf—his inheritance from old Susan—shone more like silver, as they reflected twenty little bow windows embowered in clematis, while the two brazen bowls above them—old Susan's gift again—became new in their golden lustre, picturing the roses round the doorway, down to the very bees flying hither and thither among them.

Then came the nearer view still as John stepped on to the dewy grass, and looked slyly through the casement. There was the white cloth laid, and the pink-edged cups, and the arm-chair—all invitingly ready. Ah! how many things he saw at a glance in that stolen moment from the large book

lying on the table, with its blue marker, to his Sunday boots peeping at him from the corner with a polished smile, quite ignoring their former downfall. But the brightest part of that home-picture centred in one small figure standing by the fire-place, perhaps a quarter of an inch taller than when we first saw her, but the very same little woman, brown dress and blue ribbon included.

Annie—Mrs. Merrivale now—was just taking one more fond look at the pink-edged cups and the frosted butter-dish, and the yellow musk-plant in the middle of the table; while a resplendent metal teapot went through the process of warming, and while a large apron was tied on—the signal for toast-making and frying—when a well-known greeting from the doorway made her look up.

‘Ah! here you are!’ said Annie, with a welcoming smile, as John came in; ‘and I’ve guessed the time so exactly, that when you have washed your hands and fed the squirrel, breakfast will be ready to the very second.’

John’s answer was a look that Annie loved, but he laid his hand quietly on her busy fingers.

‘Stay, just a few minutes,’ he said; ‘I have been thinking a great deal lately about the good little wife that I have been so blessed with, and about the old bargain that I made with myself. You remember it, for I told you as soon as we were

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married, and now I know that it was not the spotless stairs that took my fancy; no, nor the deft way you set about your work; it was the foundation that work was built on, Annie. I saw day by day that you did it all "as unto the Lord," and not "unto man;" and so, my girl, I have been thinking over your wish, and we will begin our house-keeping, as you say, by taking the day's work to our Master in heaven to bless. You have put the books ready again, I see, sly little Annie! You thought I had forgotten all about it.'

'Thank you! oh, thank you, John!' said Annie, with a glad smile. 'And now look how nicely I can keep our breakfast warm in the new oven while you read.'

'Yes, and we shall enjoy it more, too, afterwards,' said John, turning the leaves of his Bible over.

Annie wondered that he took so long to find the place.

'Here it is,' he said at length. 'A prudent wife is from the Lord.'

Annie moved to the back of her husband's chair, and, looking over his shoulder, turned the blue marker over, and read softly, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.'

DAME KREUTCHEN'S GEESE.

By E. M. L.

DAME KREUTCHEN stood with her hands on her sides, her chin raised above the ample folds of a snowy shawl, looking up keenly and anxiously at the dark morella cherry-tree growing on the house wall at Ulrich Farm.

‘Let me see ! what did Count Geisner’s wife give me last year for my bottle of Brandy Cherries ? Nine florins ; and not dear either !—still, I think I might have said ten.’

‘Neighbour Tutsen sold hers for six,’ remarked Lisbeth Jans, the small maid-of-all-work, as she warily mounted the ladder, with her basket.

‘That might be,’ replied Dame Kreutchen testily, ‘but think of the difference in the quality ! *Mine* all of the *best* : sugar—brandy—cherries—to say nothing of my trouble in making. Indeed, I am not sure that I shall be taking more than a fair profit if I ask twelve florins.’

‘The fact is,’ said the Dame regretfully, ‘I had hoped this year to double the produce of my

tree ; but the cherries get fewer and fewer every time I look at them. Neighbour Tutsen says it is the birds. *I* say it is those mischievous boys of hers. They are always on the look-out for my back to be turned. Well ! they must be gathered, ripe or unripe, that is very certain ; but what a pity ! what a pity ! what a pity !

The cherries were brought into the kitchen and sorted ; the fully ripe into one earthen vessel, the half-ripe and faulty into another ; and these were placed in the pantry cupboard by Dame Kreutchen's own hands.

'Good ones to the right, bad ones to the left,' she repeated to herself. 'Yes ! *I* shall remember. I *never* waste good time in idle work, so I shall cut off the cherry-stalks when it gets too dark to sew.'

'Lisbeth, child ! bring me the work-basket and scissors ; then you can clean my pantry ; and mind you do it well ! You left some finger-marks last week on my store-jars, and some dust on the left-hand corner shelf.'

Lisbeth curtseyed. 'It shall be done all right this time, missis. I'll take good care of that,' she added to herself, as she left the kitchen ; 'then Dame Kreutchen will give me a pat on the head and some candy. Last week *what* a thump she gave me, and no sugar in my tea !'

So Lisbeth Jans dusted and rubbed every shelf, cupboard, and jar, inside and outside. The earthen pans, with the morella cherries, next caught her eye, they looked dull and sticky; but they were heavy—no matter! she lifted them out, polished them till they shone again, and replaced them without so much as tasting a cherry.

Evening shadows drew on, Dame Kreutchen put up her work and at once bethought herself of the cherries.

‘I never waste my time in looking for things as some folks do,’ she said, with inward satisfaction. ‘I can find my kitchen apron in the dark; indeed, I could put my hand on anything in the house, anywhere.’ She opened the pantry door as she spoke. ‘Yes, good ones to the right; here they are! and——’

‘Lisbeth, Lisbeth! Dear, dear! where *is* the child?’

‘Coming!’ replied a small voice in the distance.

Dame Kreutchen passed her fingers carefully over the shelves. ‘You’ve done your work as it should be done, child; I don’t need a light to know that; put your hand into my pocket and you’ll find some candy. But why didn’t you run the instant I called? you should remember that *my* time is of more value than to a chit like you.’

'If you please, I was getting your candle ready, and——'

'Tut ! tut ! you know I never waste candles when firelight will do,' replied her mistress sharply. 'Still you may place one near me on the chimney-piece, and I can light it myself if needs be. *Never* put a candle where it will swale, Lisbeth ! do you hear ? Now for my scissors.'

What a snipping those scissors made ; and how pleasantly the wood fire danced up now and then, to look at them, till presently Dame Kreutchen, nodding drowsily, dropped them in the fender. Then, indeed, there was a start and a stir, and the busy hands set to work again with double energy.

'I really believe I was getting a *little* bit sleepy, Lisbeth. So I will rouse up and sing. I always had a turn for music, and a good voice.'

Dame Kreutchen sings—

'Cherries are good for market,
Cherries are good on the tree,
Cherries are good—only hark it !
Cherries are good in bran-dee.'

'There !' exclaimed Dame Kreutchen, with a broad smile of satisfaction, 'they are done, and done *well*, and all in the *time* that most people would have wasted, without my even lighting a candle !

Now, then ! quick, child, quick ! and off with them to the cupboard, while I make the tea ; there is no time to sit still, for to-morrow I must go to my other farm for some poultry, besides getting the fat geese here ready for market.'

Things do not always occur just in the order we propose to ourselves. Dame Kreutchen, it is true, was early astir, and off to the hill-farm as she had arranged to do ; but *there* she was detained a whole week by the illness of her best dappled cow, and a terrific storm which swept over the country and flooded the valley. When she at length returned, and was once more busied in her household, she found, to her dismay, that she had carefully prepared the unripe cherries, while the black over-ripe ones were mouldy.

That Dame Kreutchen should be angry with herself—with the bad light—with neighbour Tutsen's boys—with everything, but especially with Lisbeth for never having even looked into the cupboard, was, of course, what might have been expected. But that so thrifty a housewife should throw the contents of the bottles out into the yard in a mass, and the bottles themselves after it, in a towering rage, was beyond all belief.

'Waste, indeed !' exclaimed Lisbeth Jans, with her eyes, and mouth, and hands as wide open as the window she was looking through. 'I

should think the missis could never scold *me* about candle ends again !'

'What is *that* you are saying?' said the dame, in a loud harsh voice, slamming down the window in Lisbeth's face as she spoke. 'Waste, indeed! yes! and who's fault is it, I should like to know? But you won't mend matters by wasting good time at the window, staring at that rubbish! Be off to the dairy, and help with the cheese vats! Do you hear?'

At this moment Dame Kreutchen's geese happened to be waddling up the yard, and seeing the cherries, made a careful survey. 'All right,' said the gander; and 'Very good, then,' said the whole family.

Misguided, indeed, they were! but they set to and finished the cherries off—so to speak—at a sitting.

The result was awkward and even serious. No. 1 tried to make for the gate leading to the horse-pond, and the rest endeavoured to follow; but whether a high wind had got up, or whether there was a ground swell beneath them, they could not imagine. One thing was certain, they could make no progress! Some hove to, others tried to run before the wind; while the rest tacked for the pigsty. But it was all no use. One by one they lurched over, and went down, all standing.

Meanwhile Dame Kreutchen, attracted by a

strange noise in the poultry-yard, looked out and saw her ten geese gone mad! the gander balancing himself on his beak, and spinning round in a flurry of feathers and dust. The old gray goose lying on her back in the gutter, feebly moving her helpless feet; all lying in a wretched plight upside down, or struggling to rise, more and more faintly.

Dame Kreutchen called an instant council of neighbours, and after careful examination it was decided that the birds had died, or were dying, of poison; but, as they wisely remarked, the feathers were none the worse, and they could rescue them. Accordingly they all set to work and plucked away, until presently ten featherless geese lay dismally here and there in the porch. Some gone! some with a slight shiver, showing that life was not quite extinct.

'I have no time to stay and finish them off now,' said the Dame. 'I can cut their wings in the morning; they will fetch a trifle; but, oh, dear me! what a loss! what a waste!'

The next day Dame Kreutchen was early astir, having arranged with Lisbeth Jans that they would get those miserable geese under ground 'before folks were about.' Presently she turned sharply towards the little casement in the roof—for surely there were voices! Yes, and unmistakable laughter, too, in the yard below. Bending her head closer, she cautiously opened the window, and listened.

'That is it! for certain!' exclaimed Lisbeth Jans. For they are gone—every *one* of them; and it was just here that the missis threw them down in a regular *tantrum*!

'You don't say so!' said neighbour Tutsen, peering over her garden wall. 'And I believe she judged my boys of the mischief; just because they were clearing off the rats! She'd better have given me the cherries, and ——'

Dame Kreutchen shut the window with a slam. There were plenty, aye, *plenty* of people who could explain what ought to have been done when it was too late. Well, it was no use to cry and bemoan herself. She had left the poor ten plucked bodies in the porch; she must go and do *something* with them; and so, with sorrowful yet determined purpose, she approached the door.

Eh! what was that? a sound! another! another! and then in dismal chorus—a little husky! tones muffled! suggestive of a chastening headache—the well-known cries of her geese! She is sure of that; and fumbling nervously at the door, it seemed as if the bolt would never draw, or the key ever turn. At length it yielded to her efforts; and there, hissing and qua-a-king in subdued tones, suppliant and shivering, stood her flock. Pitiable enough, but still her geese!

Plump, it is true, but bare as a leafless tree.

Among them all, not enough feathers to cover one! There they stood—the ten wretched birds, with splitting headaches and parched tongues, contrite and dejected; asking piteously to have their beautiful warm plumage given back to them; shaking with cold, while their own comfortable feathers stuffed out a large bag in the corner.

No need to call in another council of neighbours! Lisbeth Jans screamed and laughed by turns. Dame Tutsen beckoned eagerly, till presently they had all flocked into the porch, talking, each louder than the other. Sorry comforters they proved!

‘Tarring and feathering,’ said old Heinrich, with a laugh, ‘is the only remedy I can think of.’

‘Didn’t I tell you,’ said Dame Tutsen, ‘that those cherries would have made an excellent pudding?’

‘And you know,’ said another voice, ‘that I begged you to wait until the geese were cold before ever you plucked them.’

‘Yes!’ said a fourth, ‘you were in such a taking, Ursula Kreutchen, you would hear no reason. You set us on there and then! It is no fault of ours.’

‘No, indeed!’ added a fifth: ‘you threw the cherries out yourself, and if the geese are not killed right off they won’t live long. See if they do!’

Neighbour Tutsen now put in her word once more. ‘I always told you it was the birds got at

those cherries, and if you had let 'em stay their time, instead of gathering them 'fore they were ready, you'd have been better off; but I'm glad you can't say the geese were poisoned now, just to spite my boys. That's what *I've* got to say!

Dame Kreutchen turned round with flashing eyes. 'Perhaps, neighbours all, you may like to know *my* opinion, and I never felt more sure of it in my life. *We're all geese together.* Good morning! No, thank you! I want no more help from any one of you, just now. Here, Lisbeth! carry some of these poor birds into the kitchen fire, and we'll think what next to do.'

What she *did* was to make flannel jackets for the lot!

Time passed on, feathers replaced the flannel, but never more did the ten geese look upon food without suspicion; and never more did they see a gathering of neighbours without feeling with a shiver that they were going to be fleeced.

Dame Kreutchen herself became an object of distrust, and instead of tumbling over each other in glad hurry to meet her in a morning, they eyed her askance from a distance, and received her gifts with reproachful hesitation.

It was well! Dame Kreutchen had learnt a lesson as well as her ten geese.

E. M. L.

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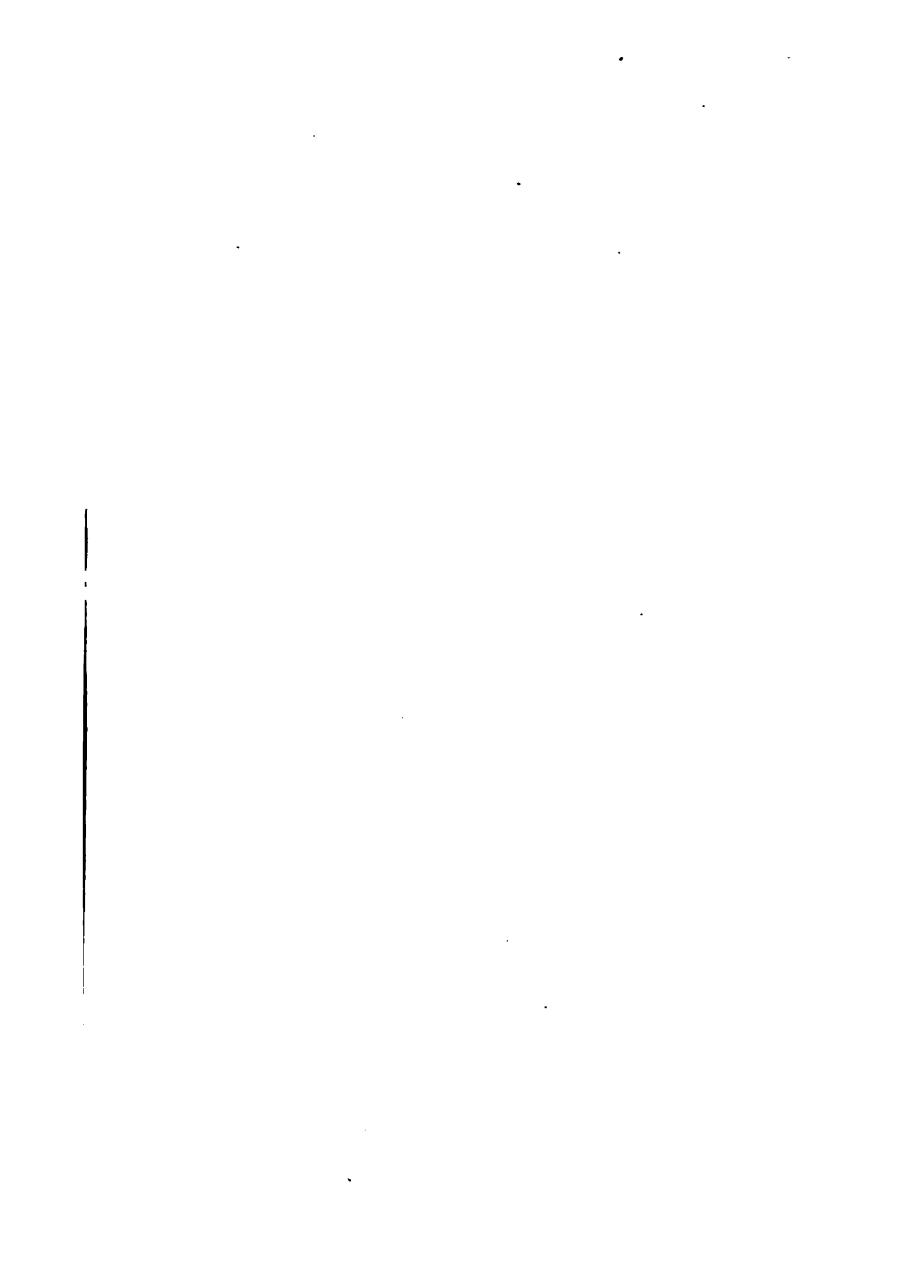
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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million. The number of people who are malnourished has increased from 1.2 billion to 1.5 billion. The number of people who are obese has increased from 100 million to 300 million.

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